

## 7. THE WORD

### —Intake: 5 Approaches

God said through the prophet Isaiah, *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”* We can begin to think God’s thoughts by immersing ourselves in His word. Our thought patterns genuinely change as God’s thoughts flow through our minds like a cleansing stream. (Ephesians 5:26)

Jesus, and the Apostle Paul, embodied this love for the word of God. The New Testament records Jesus quoting scripture 78 times, and Paul 183 times. The Jews in Jesus’ day had three levels of education. The first was called *Bet Sefer*. Jewish boys and girls, age 6-12, began their education in the synagogue school, learning to read and write from the Torah (the first five books of the Bible). The goal was to memorize the sacred text. This level concluded with a *Bar Mitzvah* for the boy, welcoming him into the community as a full member. This was also the age from which boys were allowed to read the Torah out loud during synagogue services. The next level was *Bet Midrash*. From age 13 to 15, a few boys were selected to study and memorize the entire Old Testament. The final level was *Bet Talmud*, which went from age 15 to 30 which was only for the best of the best. A young man, if selected by a Rabbi, would be groomed to become a Rabbi at age 30. Those chosen were referred to as *Talmidim*. They learned to study Torah and understand God exactly as their rabbi. Paul was almost certainly a *Talmidim* under Rabbi Gamaliel. And Rabbi Jesus was considered a “rabbi-teacher with authority” (Mark 1:27, Luke 4:32) which meant he had probably memorized the entire Old Testament. Not because he was God, but because he was a man.

The Bible describe five ways of getting God’s word into our minds:

**Hear** - The phrase “hear the word of the Lord” appears 37 times in the Bible. Jesus often said “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” We “hear” when the gospel, through scripture, is preached and taught. *Examine the following verses:* Jeremiah 7:2; Luke 8:21; Romans 10:14-17, Revelation 1:3

**Read** - God, through the Holy Spirit, gave us the sacred scriptures as a document to be read repeatedly. Many lectionary approaches have been instituted by the church over the centuries to help us do so. *Examine the following verses:* Nehemiah 8:8,18, 9:3; Luke 4:16-22; Colossians 4:16; I Timothy 4:13

**Study** - Bible study approaches include: topical studies, book/chapter analyses, character biographies, word studies, all of which take time and effort, guided by widely accepted rules of interpretation. *Examine the following verses:* Ezra 7:10; John 5:39-40; Acts 17:11; 2 Timothy 2:15

**Memorize** - It is clear that many of the Biblical authors immersed themselves in scripture and had memorized great portions. We may think we can’t memorize scripture, but most of us don’t even try. *Examine the following verses:* Deuteronomy 6:6-9; Psalm 119:9-11; Proverbs 6:20-22

**Meditate** - Like a cow ruminating on cud, when we meditate on scripture we take the verses, phrases and ideas and slowly explore every angle and implication for our thoughts and actions. *Examine the following verses:* Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:1-3; Psalm 119:48

**APPLICATION** : It may be overwhelming to think about how to incorporate these five approaches into your daily or weekly rhythms, but the reality is that if you don’t plan to do so you never will. A starting point is simply to take stock of where you are at with regard to them right now. Then record some modest goals and enlist a partner to help you. What goals will you set? Who can partner with you?